

CHEA Institute for Research  
and Study of Accreditation  
and Quality Assurance

# **Presidential Perspectives on Accreditation: A Report of the CHEA Presidents Project**

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Council for  
Higher Education  
Accreditation

CHEA

# **PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES ON ACCREDITATION:**

## **A Report of the CHEA Presidents Project**

*A national advocate and institutional voice for self-regulation of academic quality through accreditation, CHEA is an association of 3,000 degree-granting colleges and universities and recognizes 60 institutional and programmatic accrediting organizations.*

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# **PRESIDENTIAL PERSPECTIVES ON ACCREDITATION:**

## **A Report of the CHEA Presidents Project**

This report presents results of a data-gathering effort undertaken by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) Presidents Project, an initiative focused on building presidential investment and interest in accreditation as a public policy issue. CHEA initiated this project as a result of the growing perception of its board and key member presidents that many college and university leaders tend to think of accreditation principally as a process that their institutions have to undergo, rather than as an important defining element in the policy relationship between the higher education enterprise and society.

Accreditation in the United States is unique in the world as an approach to institutional development and quality assurance because it remains essentially institutionally owned and governed. CHEA believes that accreditation has reached an important place in its long and effective history – a point that requires both accreditation’s and higher education’s leaders to take stock of the enterprise and its role in public policy for higher education.

Because of this overall commitment to building presidential engagement and investment, CHEA is vitally interested in presidential opinions about accreditation. The results of the interviews as presented in this report were designed to bring the voices of sitting presidents to conversations about the public policy role of accreditation. These interviews were not intended to elicit presidential “evaluations” of the accreditation process and how it affects institutions, although opinions of this kind inevitably were voiced. Rather, the objective was to provide a solid cross-section of thoughtful institutional leaders the opportunity to reflect on their experiences with accreditation as an element of public policy, to point out areas of strength and weakness in this critical public role and to suggest those areas where the process could be improved.

### **Method**

The first step in implementing the project was to develop an interview protocol to address the project’s central questions. Several drafts of this protocol were then circulated among members of the project team and revised to clarify items and improve the overall flow of the interview (see Appendix A for a copy of the final interview protocol). Initial interview candidates were then chosen from among current presidents to reflect a balance among size and type of institution and among regions of the country. An attempt was also made to identify presidents perceived to be opinion leaders. On this basis, a letter of invitation describing the project was sent to approximately 50 candidate presidents in March 2005, with 30 affirmative responses received.

The presidents ultimately interviewed provide a good cross-section of the top leadership of the nation's colleges and universities. Sixteen were from public institutions, 13 from independent colleges or universities, and one from a private career institution. Twenty-two (22) were presidents of universities (about evenly split between recognized research universities and comprehensive universities), four were from community colleges and four from private liberal arts colleges (see Appendix B for a list of the presidents interviewed).

Together, the presidents averaged 12.2 years of total presidential experience and about a third had been presidents at other institutions before assuming their current positions. Collectively, they averaged 20.6 years of experience as senior administrators (president or vice-president). All told, these respondents thus constituted a remarkably seasoned group of senior higher education leaders.

The interviews were conducted by telephone between April and June 2005 by three members of the project team: Judith Eaton, president of CHEA; Richard Traina, chair of the CHEA Board of Directors and former president of Clark University (MA) and Robert Glidden, president emeritus of Ohio University (OH) and founding board chair of CHEA. A confirmation of the interview schedule and an overview of discussion topics were sent to each president in advance of the interview (see Appendix C for the discussion topics). While interviewees were provided topics, they offered their own responses and did not react to a prepared list of any sort. All interviewees were provided with an assurance of confidentiality.<sup>1</sup>

As the interview proceeded, responses were recorded on a previously prepared response template for aggregation purposes. Each interviewer also prepared a brief summary of the interview to record additional impressions of the interviewee's engagement and involvement with the topic. Each set of responses was then recorded in two ways – on an individual interview summary template and in the form of an Excel spreadsheet that allowed responses to be sorted by type of institution or other variables. Aggregate responses were then analyzed by Peter Ewell, senior vice president at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), to yield an initial set of conclusions for this report. These initial conclusions were reviewed by the full project team and revised as needed. They were further reviewed with a wider body of presidents convened by CHEA in December 2005 in advance of the project's final report.

## Findings

Although the interview project was a qualitative study, most of the questions posed and responses given were sufficiently clear-cut that they could be counted or classified. As a result, the discussion that follows attempts to categorize responses and their frequencies wherever possible, with direct quotations provided under each theme or topic in order to illustrate the range of opinion. Some classifications and counts are a matter of judgment as some responses were a bit ambiguous. The members of the research team examined the basic pattern of results and concur about their basic message and direction.

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<sup>1</sup>Therefore, the direct quotations included in this report for illustrative purposes are not attributed to individual presidents.

### *Knowledge of and Involvement in Accreditation*

The presidents interviewed varied substantially with respect to their own knowledge of and involvement in accreditation. While they all provided thoughtful responses, a notable minority had only limited knowledge about the accreditation process and had not been directly involved in it. Furthermore, those who were knowledgeable about accreditation often reported that their presidential colleagues were not.

Twenty-two of those interviewed had been on an accreditation team at some time in the past and 16 had chaired accreditation teams (the majority regional, but a few for specialized accrediting organizations). Nine had served on accrediting commissions at some point in their careers. A notable minority of eight presidents had never been directly involved in accreditation except as the recipients of campus visits, and these eight tended to be drawn from the more prestigious end of the institutional spectrum represented.

Collectively, interviewees reported experiencing a total of 85 regional accreditation visits in the course of their careers, an average of 2.8 for each president. On their own campuses, they reported receiving an average of 2.7 visits from specialized accrediting teams per year (excluding the four presidents of liberal arts colleges, which offer no programs that are accreditable by specialized accrediting organizations).<sup>2</sup> As a result, when reporting on their own experiences as “accreditees,” they could draw on a substantial body of experience.

### *Accreditation's Value for Institutions*

Accreditation represents a considerable investment of resources for colleges and universities. Yet all colleges and universities continue to engage the process both institutionally and programmatically – often at levels of effort that surprise observers outside this country. When asked about accreditation’s basic performance from the point of view of institutions, a number of interviewees ranged from solid to enthusiastic support for the process overall. Seven described accreditation’s performance as “very good,” 19 said “good” and only two said “poor” (two were unclassifiable). There were many reasons provided for these favorable responses, the most prominent of which were as follows (note that multiple responses from individuals are included in counts provided here):

- *The opportunity provided for self-study and reflection which the institution otherwise might not do on its own (11).*
- *Recent changes in regional accreditation to make it more flexible and linked to local planning and evaluation mechanisms (8).*
- *Self-regulation is preferable to government regulation (5).*
- *An “external check” on internal quality processes (4).*
- *Outcomes orientation (4).*
- *The opportunity for the campus to take action on an issue of importance (4).*
- *The fact that the peer review process allows “cross-fertilization” of ideas as people get beyond their own campuses to serve on teams (3).*

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<sup>2</sup>In some cases, reported numbers of visits by specialized accreditors are estimated, as at least four presidents of major universities answered, “They’re here all the time” or “They are always on campus.”

The following verbatim comments are illustrative:

- *The process is “holding up a mirror” and an opportunity to think deeply about a set of issues that the institution does not often consider. ... This is most useful.*
- *It keeps you honest in tight fiscal times...keeps you alert to your educational responsibilities.*

Tempering these very favorable ratings were some responses that expressed reservations about accreditation practice. Highlights were:

- *Perceived “narrowness” and “guild mentality” among a few specialized accreditors (16).*
- *The perception that variation among teams and team leadership hurts the consistency of the process (13).*
- *Perceived “check the box” mentality among some accreditors (4).*
- *Process is seen to be time-consuming and expensive (4).*
- *The effectiveness of the process depends largely on presidential leadership at the visited institution – whether the process is seen as a burden or an opportunity (4).*
- *Outcomes orientation is a “fad” that should not be followed (2).*

The following verbatim comments are notable:

- *Accreditation does a good job of [detecting] gross differences...lets an institution know where it fits...but the public cannot discern differences in quality when institutions with a range of quality all have an identical stamp of “accredited.”*
- *Regional accrediting processes never really get to the substance of an institution...the dialogue is not particularly well-informed about the most important issues affecting a given institution.*

Yet the presidents interviewed also overwhelmingly believed that the accreditation process adds value to their own institution, with 24 responding “yes,” one “no” and five not definitively answering the question. Themes expressed behind these ratings mirrored those noted above:

- *The opportunity for self-evaluation and reflection – as well as a link to local planning processes (10).*
- *The accountability and credibility that the process accords the institution (5).*
- *The flexibility in applying accreditation processes across different kinds of institutions (3).*

Illustrative comments on this broad topic included the following:

- *If we didn’t have it, we would have to invent it, and it’s much preferable to any imaginable alternative.*
- *It’s the “union card” in this business.*
- *It’s the preparation for accreditation – the self-assessment – that really makes it valuable.*



When asked directly about accreditation's overall value for institutions, only one of 30 respondents did not believe that accreditation was valuable for institutions, with all 29 others expressing solid support. Many of those interviewed also used their responses to this question to reinforce opinions already expressed, including the unevenness of visiting teams (3), and not wanting a government agency to be responsible for quality assurance (2). One also noted that it would be nice if the process were more "streamlined." Another noted explicitly that institutional (regional) accrediting standards were "too lax" on institutions that really had problems, thus devaluing the credential for others. Illustrative comments included the following:

- *Staff may groan at the work, but nobody questions that this needs to be done.*
- *Absolutely [it is valuable], if the institution attempts to make good use of the accreditation experience...it is a lot of work, so you might as well make it valuable.*
- *There is no question that it provides value...the only question is cost-benefit.*

Reinforcing these positive perceptions, interviewees overwhelmingly maintained that they would pursue accreditation even if it were no longer a "gatekeeper" for federal funding, with 23 reporting this and one in opposition. Three also indicated that they thought the federal link was beneficial in persuading other institutions to remain supportive of accreditation. A typical comment was "certainly – especially if [my institution's] peers were accredited...if it's the coin of the realm, people will pursue it regardless."

In the same vein of institutional impact and benefit, presidents were asked about any differences in perceptions they had about institutional (regional) and specialized accrediting organizations. In the past, many presidents and provosts have complained about the demands some specialized accrediting organizations make on institutions. But professional programs in American higher education (e.g., engineering, education, business and health-related areas) have benefited because practicing professionals in these fields have had the opportunity to influence standards and make judgments about quality performance.

The presidents interviewed were split on this matter, with 11 reporting that there were clear differences in their experiences between regional and specialized accreditors, five not seeing much of a difference and a plurality of 12 uncertain. Seven perceived regional accreditors to be doing a better job than specialized accreditors, with one reporting the opposite. Three also reported that specialized accreditors were "more quantitative" or "more specific" (the latter of which was noted with favor). The Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, Inc. (ABET) and AACSB-International were generally seen as exceptions to those who reported negatively on specialized accreditors; both organizations were seen as having significantly improved their approaches and effectiveness in recent years. And in the few cases where specific problems with specialized accreditors were mentioned, they referred to one or two among the many organizations that grant

specialized accreditation.<sup>3</sup> The general consensus about the impact of specialized accreditation was that these reviews were genuinely helpful when suggestions about curriculum or other improvements were made by visiting teams, but such reviews were not helpful if all they yielded was a recommendation for investing more resources. The following comments are illustrative:

- *Some specialized [accreditors] tend to act like trade associations....*
- *There is a proliferation of accreditation organizations...so rather than proving a meaningful experience, there are simply more experiences.*
- *[The] recent flexibility that regional accreditation has shown to use accreditation for planning at mature institutions has been accreditation's salvation...specialized accreditation is too much a vehicle for lobbying for resources.*

Taken together, these comments suggest solid support for accreditation from the point of view of its value and impact on institutions. Presidents offered criticisms that have been echoed in other circles about the occasional unevenness and lack of training of visiting team members and about the burden of institutional and specialized review on colleges and universities. But these presidents were virtually uniform in supporting accreditation.

### ***Accreditation's Value to Society***

Accreditation is intended both to assure constituents and the public of the quality and integrity of higher education institutions and programs and to help those institutions and programs to improve. In 1965, however, the role of institutional and some program accreditation changed when accrediting organizations were written into the federal Higher Education Act as gatekeepers for access to public funds. Accreditation at that point took on an additional delegated federal role of functioning as a credible and reliable authority on academic quality. Since that time, federal officials have steadily escalated their expectations of accreditation's performance, accountability and transparency, as seen in recent proposals for full public disclosure for all accreditation actions and the reasons for them and for disclosure of additional performance statistics like transfer rates and information on student outcomes.

With these extended government-related responsibilities, accreditation has found itself occupying a key place in public policy discussions about higher education and quality assurance. Given this context, a number of interview items dealt explicitly with accreditation's benefits to society, the matter of fuller public disclosure of the results of accreditation and the presidents' views of how accreditation is perceived by external constituents and higher education's leadership.

Interviewees overwhelmingly agreed with the overall proposition that accreditation is valuable to society, with 23 supporting it and only one against. Three additional presidents responded in the affirmative for regional accreditation, but not specialized. Several sub-themes tempered this overall pattern of support, however. Seven interviewees

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<sup>3</sup>As is often the case with recalled experience, moreover, those interviewed were probably more likely to remember the few negative experiences than the positive ones regarding specialized accreditors.

indicated that although society benefited, the public did not know it. Six suggested that accreditation standards were too low and implied that society would be better served by more rigorous standards. One explicitly mentioned the importance of accreditation in the context of a higher profile for for-profit institutions and the need to control degree mills. Illustrative comments included the following:

- *Accreditation is the baseline measurement of integrity and quality...it identifies the acceptable.*
- *It is a credential for the public...the public feels more secure and confident.*
- *Yes, but the public doesn't know it...people know that it's important for an institution to be accredited, but most would have no idea what an institution has to do to be accredited.*

The topic of public reporting was one of the few that elicited significant disagreement among the presidents interviewed. A plurality of 12 said that additional public reporting would hurt the accreditation process, principally by reducing the candor of reports. An additional seven said they thought that additional disclosure would make no difference, and six said that it would not hurt the process. Five took a middle position, indicating that additional public reporting would probably be a good thing but that a new vehicle for doing this would have to be developed, such as a summary report or a standard form. Though not completely the case, the division of opinion tended to follow lines of institutional control, with presidents of private institutions having considerable doubts about greater disclosure and presidents of public institutions more comfortable with it (three interviewees especially mentioned the public-private divide when responding). The following comments were typical:

- *More reporting would not hurt accreditation's effectiveness...the market already forces us to disclose and describe.*
- *Public reporting, if properly done, will enhance the credibility of accreditation.*
- *Public reporting could be abused and could do damage, but on the whole it would be a good thing and should be done. ...It underscores the importance of accreditation.*
- *Don't confess in public.*
- *It would have an immediate impact in gaining greater attention to accreditation, and that might be good, but the long-term impact would likely be negative in that many people would begin to "game" the process.*

When asked about constituent understanding and support for accreditation's role, many interviewees first distinguished between the perceptions of external and internal constituents. For example, 11 indicated that they thought higher education's leadership understood accreditation while key external constituents did not. But 15 reported that they thought neither constituency understood accreditation. Four respondents intriguingly reported that presidents "could understand, but typically do not." As one interviewee

put it, “Understanding [of accreditation] tends to be within a closed circle of highly informed people.” Several also mentioned that relatively short presidential tenures and high rates of turnover may affect presidents’ ability to invest in learning more about accreditation and getting more involved in it. Suggestions to improve current levels of understanding included the following:

- *One-on-one meetings with carefully chosen people, including legislators and corporate opinion leaders (5).*
- *Simple generic statements about the importance of accreditation to be directed toward higher education stakeholders and public opinion leaders (5).*
- *Keep the topic alive in press reports and the media (3).*
- *Organize meetings between presidents and key external stakeholders (2) and make accreditation a part of the orientation process for new presidents (1).*

Two respondents also indicated that improved external understanding would “not be worth the effort.” While it would be feasible to improve external understanding, it would also be costly in time and expense. And one might question whether the gain realized from greater understanding would have any significant effect on the enterprise.

Similar mixed patterns characterized responses on whether interviewees thought that accreditation is being responsive to higher education leaders and external constituents. Nineteen of those interviewed indicated that accreditation was responsive to higher education’s leadership, with three more indicating that they thought accreditation “tried to be responsive” (three indicated that accreditation was not responsive). Many of these answers were colored by recent changes in the accreditation process to make it more flexible: Five explicitly mentioned that greater flexibility was a good thing, while three said that more flexibility was needed. A general theme throughout was that presidents needed to take more responsibility for accreditation’s public role, with six mentioning this explicitly. The following comments were typical:

- *Accreditation will always be as responsive to presidents as presidents want it to be. ... They have to take it seriously.*
- *Yes, it’s responsive [to presidents] because it’s our system and it reflects needs concerns and values important to higher education.*
- *Presidents need to know what’s in it for them to understand and care. ... They are often too busy with other pressing issues. ... They have to be provoked to care about accreditation.*
- *Higher education leaders do not understand as well as they should. ... HEA Reauthorization is not on many presidential radar screens.*

These responses underscored a general theme among those respondents who were very knowledgeable about and involved in accreditation that presidents were crucial to accreditation’s public policy role but that many presidents were not as engaged as they should be. Lack of time and frequent turnover were seen as among the many reasons why this

condition has occurred, but most agreed that steps should be taken to increase presidential investment and advocacy.

Responses to the interview's final questions about what CHEA could do to help tended to center on each interviewee's answers to questions about responsiveness and understanding. Typical comments included:

- *Arrange for testimony of a group of presidents to Congress on the issue of degree mills.*
- *Summaries of regional accreditation reports might be prepared by institutions and sent to state and federal legislative representatives – one way to “connect” legislators to the accreditation process and what it does.*
- *People outside higher education need to know the stories in their own back yards [implying using the constituency connection for institutions to communicate with members of Congress].*

Most final comments were quite supportive of CHEA and the role that CHEA is currently playing in raising the public profile of accreditation, although a number were vague about CHEA and what it does. Many approved of CHEA taking an active and independent role in accreditation policy matters, but some indicated that this might mean taking some strong stands. As one interviewee concluded, “CHEA could be seen as the public spokesperson for accreditation – the symbol of accreditation, its credibility and integrity...but that means that it must speak out when something goes awry.”

## Summary and Conclusions

These interviews provide the CHEA Presidents Project with an important resource for understanding presidential views of accreditation. Taken together, its results suggest the following conclusions:

- The nation's higher education leadership believes strongly in the purposes of accreditation and, despite the sometimes considerable costs that the process entails for institutions, supports it as the premier mechanism for assuring academic quality in the nation. They especially see accreditation as superior to more direct forms of government accountability, either federal or state.
- Presidents recognize that the benefits of accreditation to institutions are, in an important sense, up to them. The primary payoff of participation in the accreditation process is the opportunity for institutions to reflect seriously on their own strengths and challenges and to exploit this opportunity to make improvements. This is a matter of internal investment of time and resources, and it does not happen automatically.
- Despite their strong support for the process, presidents believe that there are some things that accreditors can improve. They applaud the changes in review standards and processes that many accrediting organizations have made recently to make the process more problem-directed and flexible. But they believe team

training and chair selection could be improved and that the process could be made more streamlined and cost effective. Some worry that among regional accreditors, standards are not set high enough or are not enforced rigorously enough. Among specialized accreditors, they worry when the intent of a review appears to be more about leveraging resources than about improving programs.

- Despite recent calls for it, presidents remain wary of increased public disclosure of the results of accreditation reviews. While all believe in openness and candor, a lot of presidents also believe that public disclosure may lead to information distortion and a tendency to “game” the process.
- Presidents are concerned that the accreditation process is not well understood by the public and by constituents to whom it is supposed to assure quality. They also worry that many among their own ranks do not sufficiently understand the process or actively invest in it at a time when clear voices are needed to protect accreditation’s integrity and standing as an element of public policy. They believe that more efforts are needed to promote broader understanding of accreditation’s purposes and effectiveness and that CHEA can help in this endeavor.

These views, rounded out by additional presidential opinions gathered on an ongoing basis, can help CHEA craft a more effective strategy for building public support for accreditation as the keystone in this nation’s approach to assuring the quality of higher education. Voluntary, peer-based accreditation makes our country unique in the world with respect to higher education quality assurance, and many other nations are now seeking to adopt accreditation-like models because of these virtues. It is an asset that we should promote and invest in to make our higher education enterprise better.

## ***Appendix A: Interview Protocol***

President: \_\_\_\_\_  
Institution: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Duration: \_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

### *Introduction*

Accreditation is a uniquely American institution with a rich history that dates back more than a hundred years. We at the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) believe that accreditation is at an important point in that history, a point that requires both accreditation's and higher education's leaders to take stock of the enterprise and its role in public policy for higher education.

The purpose of this interview is to examine your perceptions, from the specific point of view of your role as a college or university president, about the current place of accreditation in American higher education. Your views will be integrated with those of some 25 of your presidential colleagues into a public report to be published by CHEA.

All responses will be confidential, and individual interviewees will not be identified.

### *Interviewee's Experience with Accreditation*

1. Personal Background
  - a. Years as a President or CEO: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Years as a Senior Administrator (Chief Academic Officer, Vice President, Dean): \_\_\_\_\_
2. Participation in Accreditation
  - a. Member of team: Yes: \_\_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Team chair Yes: \_\_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Commission member Yes: \_\_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Date of most recent service \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:
3. Number of regional accreditation visits to your campus while president or senior administrator.
  - a. Visits (current institution): \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Visits (previous institutions): \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

*Appendix A: Interview Protocol (continued)*

Specialized accreditation visits to your campus while president or senior administrator.

c. *Number of specialized accreditation organizations:* \_\_\_\_\_

(\_\_\_\_\_ *accredited programs*)

(\_\_\_\_\_ *programs seeking accreditation*)

d. *Visits from specialized accreditors/year on average:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Comments:*

*Effectiveness of Accreditation for Institutions*

*Discussion Points*

- *Accreditation represents a considerable investment of resources for colleges and universities.*
  - *Yet all continue to engage the process both institutionally and programmatically, often at levels of effort that surprise observers outside this country.*
4. Interviewee's perception of how well accreditation does its job. What does accreditation do well? What are its shortcomings?
5. Does accreditation provide added value to your own institution?
- a. *Yes:* \_\_\_\_\_ *No:* \_\_\_\_\_
- Reasons why or why not:*

*Discussion Points*

- *Many presidents and provosts complain about the demands some specialized accrediting organizations make on institutions.*
  - *But professional programs in American higher education (e.g., engineering, education, business and health-related areas) have benefited because practicing professionals in these fields have had the opportunity to influence standards and make judgments about quality performance.*
6. Are there any differences in effectiveness between institutional and specialized accreditation?
- a. *Yes:* \_\_\_\_\_ *No:* \_\_\_\_\_
- If yes, describe:*
7. Are institutional and specialized accreditation worth it for institutions?
8. Are institutional and specialized accreditation of benefit to society?
9. If accreditation were no longer a gatekeeper for federal funds, would your institution pursue it?
- a. *Yes:* \_\_\_\_\_ *No:* \_\_\_\_\_
- Reasons why or why not:*



10. Would changes in public reporting (e.g., making reports public for all institutions, whether public or private) affect accreditation's effectiveness?

a. Yes: \_\_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_\_

*Comments:*

### ***Accreditation Practice and the Current Policy Climate***

#### **Discussion Points**

- Accreditation is intended both to assure institutions and the public of the quality and integrity of higher education institutions and programs and to help them improve.
  - In 1965, the role of institutional and some programmatic accreditors changed when they were written into the Higher Education Act as gatekeepers for access to federal funds.
  - Accreditation took on the additional role of functioning as a reliable authority on academic quality to the federal government.
  - Federal officials have also escalated their expectations of accreditation's performance, accountability and transparency, e.g.,
    - Full public disclosure for all accrediting actions and reasons for those actions.
    - Public disclosure of transfer rates, institutional policies and criteria for acceptance.
  - Accreditation also plays a "reliable authority" role at the state level, although this is not a gatekeeper function.
  - With these expanded government-related responsibilities, accreditation has found itself occupying a key place in public policy discussions about higher education and quality assurance.
11. Do higher education leaders and decision-makers and opinion leaders outside higher education understand this public policy role?
- a. Yes: \_\_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_\_ Somewhat: \_\_\_\_\_
- Comments:*
- b. *What could be done to improve their understanding about the public policy role?*
12. Is accreditation as practiced today responsive to the expectations of both higher education leaders and decision-makers outside higher education? What could the accreditation community do to be more responsive?
13. What can CHEA do to help enhance accreditation's credibility and public policy role?

#### ***Other Comments on the Interview***

## ***Appendix B: Interview Participants***

Lawrence S. Bacow  
Tufts University

Jacquelyn M. Belcher  
Georgia Perimeter College

Andrew K. Benton  
Pepperdine University

Henry S. Bienen  
Northwestern University

Mary Brown Bullock  
Agnes Scott College

Nancy Cantor  
Syracuse University

David A. Caputo  
Pace University

Mary Sue Coleman  
University of Michigan - Ann Arbor

Scott S. Cowen  
Tulane University

Ronald A. Crutcher  
Wheaton College

George M. Dennison  
The University of Montana

David B. Frohnmayer  
University of Oregon

Alexander Gonzalez  
California State University - Sacramento

Kermit L. Hall  
State University of New York at Albany

Joseph N. Hankin  
Westchester Community College

Karen A. Holbrook  
The Ohio State University

William E. Kirwan  
The University System of Maryland

Peter W. Likins  
University of Arizona

Edward A. Malloy, C.S.C.  
University of Notre Dame

Ronald Mason, Jr.  
Jackson State University

Martha McLeod  
Asnuntuck Community College

Jerry R. Moskus  
Metropolitan Community College

Laura Palmer Noone  
University of Phoenix

Russell K. Osgood  
Grinnell College

Steven B. Sample  
University of Southern California

Jake B. Schrum  
Southwestern University

Andrew A. Sorensen  
University of South Carolina - Columbia

Stephen Joel Trachtenberg  
The George Washington University

Larry N. Vanderhoef  
University of California - Davis

Edwin H. Welch  
University of Charleston

## ***Appendix C: Interview Discussion Topics***

### **CHEA Presidents Project**

#### *Interview Discussion Topics*

Accreditation is a uniquely American institution with a rich history that dates back more than a hundred years. We at the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) believe that accreditation is at an important point in that history, a point that requires both accreditation's and higher education's leaders to take stock of the enterprise and its role in public policy for higher education.

#### ***Effectiveness of Accreditation for Institutions***

- Accreditation represents a considerable investment of resources for colleges and universities. Yet all continue to engage the process both institutionally and programmatically, often at levels of effort that surprise observers outside this country. Based on your own experience, what is your perception of how well accreditation does its job? Does it provide value to your institution? How?
- While some specialized accrediting organizations may make significant demands on institutions, professional programs such as business, education, engineering and the health fields have benefited because practicing professionals in these areas have had the opportunity to influence standards and make judgments about quality performance. How do you view specialized accreditation? Are there any differences between institutional and specialized accreditation? Do you view it as beneficial to programs in your institution, to the institution as a whole and to society?

#### ***Accreditation Practice and the Current Policy Climate***

- Accreditation is intended both to assure institutions and the public of the quality and integrity of higher education institutions and programs and to help them improve. Accreditation's additional roles include acting as gatekeeper for access to federal funds and functioning as a reliable authority on academic quality at both federal and state levels. As a result, it is occupying a key place in public policy discussions about higher education and quality assurance. Do higher education leaders and decision-makers outside higher education understand this public policy role?
- As you know, Congress took up reauthorization of the Higher Education Act two years ago, and we are still working on this. Because of its role as a gatekeeper, federal officials have escalated their expectations of accreditation's performance, accountability and transparency. Is accreditation responsive to the expectations of both higher education leaders and decision-makers outside higher education?

## ***Appendix D: Accreditation and Presidential Leadership Roundtable***

*Washington, DC • December 13, 2005*

### *Summary*

#### ***Introduction***

On December 13, 2005, a group of college and university presidents and association presidents met in Washington, DC with the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) board chair Richard P. Traina, Presidents Project leader Robert Glidden, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) vice president Peter Ewell and CHEA staff to discuss a draft of “Presidential Perspectives on Accreditation,” a report of 30 interviews that CHEA conducted April - June 2005 to learn more about presidential perceptions of institutional and programmatic accreditation.

For the most part, the discussion confirmed the key points that emerged in the interviews of presidents. Accreditation is of significant value to institutions and society. At the same time, there are areas of accreditation activity that might be improved. And the public policy and political role that accreditation plays can be strengthened in a number of ways.

A significant feature of the December 13, 2005 discussion was the emerging awareness that there is a need to revisit the comprehensive “vision” of accreditation and its relationship to self-regulation and accountability. Specifically, many in the higher education community do not uniformly see accreditation as urgent, but take the U.S. system of accreditation for granted and do not appreciate its fundamental importance as a principal safeguard against government intervention. External constituents do not understand accreditation, and accreditors themselves sometimes appear more interested in perpetuating a “professional” role, rather than perceiving themselves as advocates for self-regulation. There is a need to set a “higher level of expectation” for the entire enterprise of accreditation.

Roundtable participants discussed the three major areas addressed in the interviews: the accreditation process, the accreditation-government relationship and the relationship of accreditation to the public interest. In each area, participants offered suggestions for what CHEA, working with associations and accrediting organizations, might undertake.

#### ***The Accreditation Process***

1. Educate our own community, especially new presidents.
2. Assist institutions as they prepare to host accreditation reviews.
3. Provide assistance regarding specialized accreditation, especially for presidents who have had little or no experience with specialized reviews.
4. Establish a “Complaint/Help” function where presidents can go in case of conflict.

*(continued)*

5. Expand training for consultant evaluators and team chairs.
6. Establish a CHEA “visiting committee” of presidents and former presidents to help with complaints and to review the condition of the enterprise, perhaps every two to three years.
7. Increase trustee involvement, working with trustee associations to make certain that trustees are informed about accreditation results.

***The Accreditation-Government Relationship***

1. Establish CHEA as a “responsible and reliable authority” on accreditation for the federal government, serving as an “authoritative clarifier” and identifying positions of various constituencies, as well as playing an advocacy role for a particular position from time to time.
2. Increase advocacy with selected lawmakers and the Department of Education.
3. Educate lawmakers with perhaps a “10-minute” piece on how the accreditation process works.

***Accreditation and the Public Interest***

1. Show evidence of serving the public interest - provide “real experience” stories about how accreditation has helped institutions to improve.
2. Change the fundamental approach of accreditation to make a more explicit statement about levels of quality to the public, e.g., a move toward differentiation of institutions and programs based on how well they meet standards.
3. Provide a forum for thorough discussion of the difficult topic of public information/disclosure. What do students want to know? What do lawmakers need to know? What information or disclosure would accomplish this?
4. Address the major strains in the national de facto structure of accreditation with three types of institutional accreditors (regional, faith-based and private career) and the specialized accreditors, particularly regarding transfer of credit.

## ***Appendix E:*** ***Accreditation and Presidential Leadership Roundtable Participants***

Robert C. Andringa  
President  
Council for Christian Colleges  
and Universities

John E. Bassett  
President  
Clark University

George R. Boggs  
President  
American Association of  
Community Colleges

Larry L. Earvin  
President  
Huston-Tillotson University

Peter T. Ewell  
Vice President  
National Center for Higher Education  
Management Systems  
(Author, "Presidential Perspectives  
on Accreditation")

Bobby Fong  
President  
Butler University

Robert B. Glidden  
President Emeritus  
Ohio University  
(Presidents Project Consultant)

James T. Harris  
President  
Widener University

Richard T. Ingram  
President  
Association of Governing Boards  
of Colleges and Universities

Thomas C. Meredith  
Chancellor  
Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning

Elisabeth S. Muhlenfeld  
President  
Sweet Briar College

Laura Palmer Noone  
President  
University of Phoenix  
(by telephone)

Stephen J. Trachtenberg  
President  
The George Washington University

Richard P. Traina  
Vice President  
George I. Alden Trust  
(Chair, CHEA Board of Directors)

David Ward  
President  
American Council on Education

### ***CHEA Staff***

Judith S. Eaton  
President

Jan Riggs  
Director of Membership Services  
and Special Projects

Judith Watkins  
Vice President for Accreditation Services

### **2005-2006 CHEA Board of Directors**

Richard P. Traina, *Chair*, Trustee, George I. Alden Trust  
Gregory M. O'Brien, *Vice Chair*, President, Argosy University  
Charles R. Nash, *Secretary*, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs,  
The University of Alabama System  
Piedad F. Robertson, *Treasurer*, President, Education Commission of the States  
Arthur J. Rothkopf, *Immediate Past Chair*, Senior Vice President &  
Counselor to the President, U.S. Chamber of Commerce  
Michael F. Adams, President, University of Georgia  
R. Judson Carlberg, President, Gordon College  
Gerald G. Garbacz, Managing Director, G3 LLC  
N. Victor Goodman, Partner, Benesch, Friedlander, Coplan & Aronoff LLP  
Nancy A. Marlin, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs,  
San Diego State University  
Margaret A. McKenna, President, Lesley University  
Charles Mitchell, Chancellor, Seattle Community Colleges  
Charles B. Reed, Chancellor, The California State University  
John D. Wiley, Chancellor, University of Wisconsin – Madison  
Carolyn Williams, President, Bronx Community College

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